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SUBJECT: BERGEN CONFERENCE ON NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The 7th International Conference on Human Rights and Refugees "North Korea New Approaches" held in Bergen, Norway May 9-11 brought together government and NGO officials to discuss ways to advance human rights in North Korea. Officials and NGOs agreed that while little improvement has been made on human rights in North Korea, consistently raising the issue in international fora, in meetings with DPRK officials, and holding the DPRK accountable to the few international agreements it has signed can help improve the human rights situation in the country. The tone of the conference was positive despite frustrations expressed by government and non-government officials over difficulties of working on the issue given the North Korean government's extreme self-imposed isolation. Participants worked to approach old problems from new angles. To help broaden viewpoints, Norwegian hosts combined cultural performance with substantive elements in the three day program. Outcomes may be difficult to judge, but there was no shortage of ideas for engaging with North Koreans in order to improve human rights in the DPRK. Keeping NGOs on the ground to provide emergency services, bilateral and multilateral official contact for governments like Norway and Sweden that have diplomatic relations with the DPRK, and increasing North Koreans' access to information from the outside world were discussed as ways to enhance human rights in the DPRK and to bring North Korea into the community of nations. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶2. (U) Norwegian Human Rights NGO Rafto House and the Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights co-sponsored the 7th International Conference on Human Rights and Refugees May 9-11 in Bergen, Norway. The "New Approaches North Korea" conference brought together government, UN, and NGO officials as well as academics to discuss ways to improve human rights in North Korea. Government officials attending the conference included Japanese Ambassador to Norway Fumiko Saiga, Ambassador and Special Advisor to Sweden on North Korea Paul Beijer, South Korean Ambassador for Human Rights Kyung-seo Park, and UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK Vittit Muntarbhorn. Former Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, National Endowment for Democracy President USA Garl Gershman, Anti-Slavery International Advocacy Officer Norma Kang Muico, and U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea Executive Director Debra Liang-Fenton also participated. There were no official USG presentations, but Pamela Spratlen, Deputy to Jay Lefkowitz Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea and USEMB Oslo poloff attended the conference. Initial presentations focused on assessing the human rights situation in North Korea and searching for ways to engage North Koreans and the DPRK government on human rights. Subsequent breakout sessions covered refugee issues, sports in politics,

communication strategies, and good NGO practices. Conference organizers combined arts and cultural presentations (some by North Koreans) with panel discussions and presentations.

Engage with North Korea Whenever Possible

¶3. (U) Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights representative Benjamin Yoon began the discussion by focusing on the benefits of public engagement with North Koreans on human rights. He challenged the assembled government and NGO leaders to apply an international standard of human rights to the DPRK and to bring human rights issues to DPRK officials attention whenever possible. There is value in publicizing information about specific human rights cases and bringing them to DPRK officials' attention, particularly in international venues. North Korean officials are aware of U.N. concerns about human rights in their country and the DPRK will react positively to external pressure put on specific human rights cases.

¶4. (U) National Endowment for Democracy, USA, President Carl Gershman continued on the engagement theme stating that human rights pressure is essential to provide support to those seeking freedom inside the DPRK. Publicizing the plight of detainees and following-up on their cases helps protect refugees who return to the DPRK. Gershman advocated integrating human rights discussions into talks on security and economic development. While refugee advocacy is still a priority for the Endowment, they also have plans to broadcast information to North Koreans to debunk government propaganda.

In his assessment, a looming DPRK economic crisis will force breakdown of the government's control. Consistent pressure on human rights issues within North Korea will help speed this breakdown as stories of life outside the DPRK are broadcast to the North Korean people.

¶5. (U) Former Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik called North Korea a society in crisis and the DPRK a government that has lost respect for human dignity. He underscored that the DPRK nuclear and WMD programs are a serious concern, and that pressure must be maintained to get six-party talks restarted; further, the DPRK must let IAEA inspectoQin to their country and the DPRK must respect UN human rights resolutions and allow Special Rapporteur Viti Muntarbhorn into the country. However, Bondevik cautioned that if diplomacy is neglected when engaging North Koreans, there is no certainty that the desired democratic outcome will be achieved. He sees the South Korean government's Sunshine Policy and the consistent and coordinated pressure applied to South Africa's apartheid regime as models to improve human rights in North Korea.

UN Rapporteur: No Progress on Human Rights in the Last Year

¶6. (U) United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the DPRK Viti Muntarbhorn provided a bleak assessment of the current human rights situation and outlined specific steps to improve it. Note: Muntarbhorn, a Thai human rights lawyer, was appointed in August 2004, but the DPRK government refuses to recognize his mandate or invite him into the country. End note. He described four general human rights concerns. First, food shortages are still prevalent in North Korea and aid agencies are still needed to distribute food aid. While the WFP is providing aid, its development framework needs to include human rights. Second, North Korea is not enforcing existing labor laws or respecting international human rights agreements. North Korea is party to four human rights treaties and the DPRK recently changed its criminal code, but terms of these agreements and changes are not being enforced. Third, freedom of movement within North Korea is not being respected. Returning refugees Q not granted freedom of movement and they face officially sanctioned persecuted upon return. Fourth, the right to self-determination / political participation, access to information, freedom of expression

are all compromised within North Korea -- while some citizens have access to foreign information, there is no genuine free press, political dissent is repressed, citizens cannot have computers or listen to foreign radio and TV without government permission. Muntarbhorn had specific concerns regarding respect for the rights of those most vulnerable in North Korean society: women, children, and the disabled. Again, while protections may be afforded in law for these groups, implementation and enforcement within the North Korean legal regime is not happening.

A Bleak Picture, But Ways to Move Forward

¶7. (U) While the Special Rapporteur cited no progress in the North Korean human rights situation in the last year, he did offer several specific actions that North Korea and the international community could take to improve the situation. He suggested that North Korea could allocate resources to enforce compliance with existing human rights conventions, reform national laws to regulate travel within the country, and abolish sanctions for dissidents. He also urges that the DPRK liberalize its legal system to promote the rights of the disadvantaged and to build capacity for law enforcement. Humanitarian agencies should be allowed to stay in the country, and UN monitoring bodies and the UN Rapporteur (hQself) should be allowed into the DPRK. The international community needs to do its part by providing food aid, supporting the UN Rapporteur's recommendations, respecting asylum principles, and assisting the DPRK with prison reform. Finally, the international community should link human rights to security issues on the peninsula.

A Norwegian View

¶8. (U) Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative Petter Wille offered a Norwegian view of how to improve the human rights situation within the DPRK by coordinating cooperation among civil society actors to promote human rights. Humanitarian aid is a key to building civil society, but NGOs find it more and more difficult to work in North Korea due to increased government restrictions. Despite these difficulties, Norwegians feel that NGOs must maintain their presence to help those in need and to maintain contact with the North Korean government to help prevent future disasters. Norwegians deplore the North Korean WMD program and all that the program does to undermine non-proliferation efforts elsewhere in the world. While they want to pressure North Korea to disarm and to resume six-party talks, they see dialogue and consultation as the way to move forward.

North Korean Migrants and Trafficking

¶9. (U) Anti-Slavery International Education Officer Norma Kang Muico described the causes of and current state of trafficking in North Korea in one of the conference breakout sessions. Declining trade, poor harvests, and a breakdown in the North Korean food distribution system led to an increase in economic migration from North Korea into China in the mid 1990s. Muico stated that while many migrants fled North Korea for legitimate economic reasons, many women were sold into marriages by their families and villages or sold outright to trafficking agents. The continuing food crisis in the region and demand for brides in rural areas of China keeps these migration and trafficking patterns going. The Chinese government policy of arrest and deportation back to DPRK compounds the problem as repatriated trafficking victims face discrimination and forced labor upon return to North Korea.

¶10. (SBU) There are an estimated 50,000 North Koreans living in Chinese border provinces. Estimates of the numbers of persons trafficked into China are difficult to obtain due to

lack of access to officials and the sensitivity of the subject. Private estimates are that there may be several hundred thousand individuals trafficked into China in recent years. Muico outlined some specific steps that can be taken to combat trafficking into China and improve human rights for refugees returning to North Korea. The North Korean government should stop the use of forced labor in detention camps and change their criminal code. China should give humanitarian status to North Korean women who have been trafficked and should give the UNHCR access to North Koreans in China. The international community should raise protection of North Korean refugees in meetings with Chinese officials.

Official Views: Sweden, Japan, South Korea

¶11. (U) Special Advisor to the Swedish Government on Korea, Ambassador Paul Beijer, who served as his government's Ambassador to North Korea from 2001-2005, gave his take on the donor dilemma issue. Isolationist DPRK propaganda links outside assistance with outside interference and the West's desire for regime change. This leads North Koreans to view assistance as a threat to their way of life and aid as something that should not be accepted. The collectivist mindset of the North Korean government sees no contradiction in denying food or human rights to individuals as long as collective rights (to their way of life) are protected. In a doctrinaire regime, only systemic change will improve things.

Bringing about such change requires new approaches.

Traditional methods of applying pressure to governments don't work with North Korea: Military threats only deepen the country's war footing; isolation keeps the government in control; naming and shaming human rights abuses only results in a shutdown of NGO work. Other methods may bring some partial results, but have unintended consequences: Economic sanctions only feed the government's desire for isolation and self-sufficiency; dialogue is difficult since the government is manipulative and good at negotiation. Beijer sees engagement as the only way forward and the only way to break through a system that is, as he says, strong but brittle. EU and Swedish engagement on humanitarian assistance gave North Korean citizens exposure to new ways of doing things. Through constant contact the DPRK government's control over its citizens can be lessened and eventually overcome.

¶12. (U) Japanese Ambassador to Norway Fumiko Saiga outlined her government's efforts to normalize relations with North Korea and build a comprehensive peace in Northeast Asia. Continuing bi-lateral and multi-lateral engagement helps make North Korea a more normal society. By focusing on important issues (abductee repatriation, normalization of relations) Japan can help pull the DPRK into community of nations. Rejoining stalled six-party talks will do the same thing. Ambassador Saiga stressed that it is vital that North Korea keep a positive attitude toward resolving outstanding problems.

¶13. (U) South Korean Ambassador at Large for Humanitarian Affairs Kyung-seo Park sees peace and stability as key to creating an environment that will move the DPRK forward. While North Korea is ultimately responsible for itself, there are actions the ROK can take to improve human rights in North Korea. The first priority is securing North Koreans' right to food. The ROK will increase monitoring of food aid to North Korea. The second priority for his government is to provide defectors assistance with resettlement, re-integration, and employment. Reuniting separated families, engaging in north-south talks, and providing humanitarian and economic assistance are also key ways to support human rights within North Korea.

Communication Strategies: Engagement and Broadcast

¶14. (U) In another breakout session, Vincent Brossel from

Reporters Without Borders, documentary producer Nicholas Bonner, and Tae Keung Ha from Open Radio for North Korea discussed communication problems in North Korea. Cultural exchanges may slowly erode rigid cultural barriers to communication for a few, but the lack of independent media or a functioning and free press make it very difficult to reach large groups within the DPRK. Medium wave and short wave radios are available and broadcasting into North Korea may be the best way to get information to the North Korean people. According to Tae Keung Ha, who represents a South Korean NGO broadcasting messages into North Korea, penalties for listening to non-official stations on non-registered radios are decreasing. Since possession of transferable media such as CDs and tapes reportedly result in very severe penalties, broadcasting into the DPRK is, as he puts it, the best way to provide "mental food" not just food aid to North Korean people.

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